

2006

INNATE

Kiara Pelissier

Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

© The Author

Downloaded from

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1016>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

School of the Arts
Virginia Commonwealth University

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Kiara Pelissier entitled INNATE has been approved by his or her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Jack Wax, Professor of Glass, School of the Arts

Susan Iverson, Professor of Fibers, School of the Arts

Susie Ganch, Professor of Metals, School of the Arts

Sonya Clark, Chair, Department of Crafts/Material Studies, School of the Arts

Richard Toscan, Dean, School of the Arts

Dr. F. Douglas Boudinot, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

May 10, 2006

© Kiara Pelissier 2006

All Rights Reserved

INNATE

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

KIARA PELISSIER

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Cleveland Institute of Art, 2000

Master of Fine Arts, VCU School of the Arts, 2006

Director: JACK WAX

PROFESSOR OF GLASS, DEPARTMENT OF CRAFTS/MATERIAL STUDIES

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May, 2006

Acknowledgement

One thousand thank yous to my parents, Jaime and Serena Pelissier, for never doubting me, and for their continuous love and support.

I would like to give a big hug and thank you to my professor, Jack Wax, who was not only one of my very first instructors in glass, but someone who believed in me from the start of my career and who later encouraged me to pursue graduate school.

I would like to thank my boyfriend, Daniel Cottner, for moving to Richmond to be with me during these two years of intense investigation into my work. You are my rock!

My thanks to the faculty on my committee and those whom I invited to partake in those discussions: Jack Wax, Susan Iverson, the late Morris Yarowsky, Susie Ganch, and Javier Tapia.

Many thanks to my peers who have made this graduate school experience a rich and memorable one.

And an enormous thank you to my installation crew during the assembly of my thesis piece, INNATE, at Anderson Gallery: Kari Mølstad, Christian Nørgaard Christensen, Katie Hudnall, Elizabeth Perkins, Sayaka Suzuki, David Bruce, Nicole Puzan, Debbie Quick, Patrick Whalen and Sarah Mizer. It would not have come together as it did without your help!

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	iv
Abstract	v
Artist Statement	vii
Sections of Thesis:	
My Development Through Technique and Concept	1
Inspirations and Artistic Influences	11
Innate	20
Works Cited	28
Vita	29

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: <i>Memory</i>	2
Figure 2: <i>Mind Over Matter</i>	4
Figure 3: <i>Itch</i>	5
Figure 4: <i>Before</i>	6
Figure 5: <i>After</i>	6
Figure 6: <i>The Visitor</i>	7
Figure 7: <i>Untitled</i>	7
Figure 8: <i>Ache</i>	8
Figure 9: <i>Almost Beautiful</i>	13
Figure 10: <i>You</i>	13
Figure 11: <i>Taratantara</i>	14
Figure 12: <i>Innate</i>	25

Abstract

INNATE

By Kiara Pelissier, Master of Fine Arts

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: Jack Wax
Professor of Glass, Department of Crafts/Material Studies

This thesis opens with my artist statement which summarizes what it is I focus on as an artist. The main body of the thesis is an in-depth description of how my work has evolved over the last six years since receiving my BFA degree from the Cleveland Institute of Art in Cleveland, Ohio. I also include the artists and literature that have inspired me over the years and explain why they are important to me. The final section of this writing focuses directly on the piece I made for the MFA Thesis Exhibition at Anderson Gallery. The piece is entitled *Innate*. It encompasses numerous desires and frustrations I have

experienced as a human being and as an artist. In that section of writing I elaborate on the inspirations and intentions I had for making the piece.

Artist Statement

I often think of life as a tight rope stretching across an expanse. Our inner strength enables us to walk forward across it. When this fails us, we fall. But in those moments when we prevail, we soar and float as though weightless and timeless.

As a gymnast I learned that control of one's insecurities results in a powerful and balanced presence of body. Give into them and the body becomes uncertain and clumsy. Rarely is life this transparent. Many forms of tension manifest themselves in physical, spiritual, and emotional unrest. How does the physical contour of the skin reflect the soul of a material body? Through the use of tension and balance, and with the aid of transparency, translucency, and opacity I alter the perception of surface, form, internal and external space. My work is a comment on the flux of my emotions and attitude towards daily life. This includes moments clouded by insecurity, restlessness, and fatigue as well as the moments in which we free ourselves.

My Development Through Technique and Concept

There is such an energy in a glass hot shop—the roaring of the furnaces, the dialogue between the glassblowers, and the rhythm of the movements required to shape the material—that I was drawn to the environment and to glass in its molten state since the moment I first laid eyes on them. That happened in 1987 when I was eleven years old. I decided then and there that someday I would learn how to manipulate this seductive material. I didn't get to try blowing glass until my second encounter with it in 1995. I felt the same as I did when I was eleven. The process is so physical. When the glass is hot it moves and glows as if alive.

When I finally began blowing glass I dove into the technical process head first. I focused on glassblowing year-round. I took workshops with many different instructors and assisted in the teaching process. Glass technicians and artists working with glass were my heroes. I strove to learn as much as possible about blowing glass, particularly Venetian-style glassblowing techniques. I sought to perfect the rhythm, the timing, and the temperature involved and hoped to achieve clean forms and flowing lines in my glass vessels. I placed excellent craftsmanship and design above all else. I looked up to the artists who I felt were the best in the field and who made work that reflected their

personalities and ideals. I was inspired by the glass work of such technicians and artists as William Morris, Dante Marioni, Marc Petrovic, Jack Wax, Michael Scheiner, Howard Ben Tre, Daniel Clayman, Michael Schunke, Ben Edols and Kathy Elliot, and Boyd Sugiki to name but a few.

By the end of my undergraduate study at the Cleveland Institute of Art I had begun to investigate larger scale work made up of multiple components. I made many blown glass forms in the hot shop by repeating a shape over and over, but slightly changing the scale and diameter of each. After the parts were made I could take my time assembling them. I found that working with multiples offered me a way to continue with an idea outside of the glass studio. The intensity of the hot shop sessions were exciting, and as much as I loved blowing glass I also wished to expand on my ideas in other ways.



Figure 1: *Memory*, 2000

Memory, completed in 2000, was the first piece I made using multiple parts. It was a work that drew on the creative activities of my childhood. As a child I made environments inside and outside our home using such things as chairs, sheets, string, twigs, leaves, and the rushes that grew along the edge of the pond. *Memory* was a reflection of these years. I found the piece to be nurturing, peaceful, and to contain a quiet stillness.

While making *Memory*, I also began to explore the use of other materials in conjunction with glass. This

exploration was both exciting and unnerving for me, for I had had very little experience incorporating other materials into my work. I remembered seeing the work of Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto at The Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the Carnegie International Exhibition of 1999. His piece, *Nude Plasmic*, encouraged viewers to take their shoes off and step inside a translucent, membrane-like environment. As I walked through his installation, the nylon sprang back up after every step. Both my body and the piece itself became instantly activated as this high-stepping continued through the tunnels and passages inside. Ernesto Neto was my first, major artistic influence outside the glass world and I wondered if I could ever achieve such an outstanding sensation from my own work.

During the three and a half years between undergraduate and graduate school I worked production for other glass artists. I was determined to gain as much technical proficiency in glassblowing as possible. I also continued with my own work. A small series emerged from the making of *Memory*, and the process of working with multiples has carried over into my work today.

When I began my graduate studies at VCU, I was still enamored of technical perfection in the making of glass pieces. I was also thinking a great deal about my years as a gymnast and of all the training and practice involved in striving for the perfect routine. As I worked on *Mind Over Matter* in 2004, I focused on the machine-like, mechanical aspect of the body. I filled a cylindrical, glass form with blown glass spheres that fit snugly inside it like a package. These spheres represented the muscles of the body. The piece stands on toe-point, so to speak, and the glass portion is roughly five feet and five



Figure 2: *Mind Over Matter*, 2004

inches tall which is the height of my body. I placed it on top of a balance beam I made from MDF. Although the length of the beam has been reduced significantly, the beam's height of four feet and its width of four inches remains true to scale. This glass piece stands tall, proud, and elegant, but the result was cold and stiff. Viewers had a hard time recognizing the form as a human body. In retrospect I realized that the piece lacked warmth. There were hardly any curves to mention and there were no colors other than white and clear. I had been concentrating on the discipline of the athlete who must overcome emotion and fear to the best of her abilities. Because of this desire to overcome, I had omitted every

trace of the human hand and emotion. The piece referred to a moment when those things are overridden, a moment when the brain's doubts are hushed and the body performs as pure machine.

Itch was evolving at the same time. Again, I referenced the body as a machine, substituting glass gears for muscles. The gears were made by blowing long tubes of glass and slicing them up into quarter-inch pieces on a diamond saw. Most of the "machine" was lethargic, but it also had an itch, a nervous anxiousness. I wished to convey the tension that the body experiences as a direct result of the mind. I made a fishing net out of monofilament and netted some 400 gears into it to symbolize their inability to function properly in their paralyzed state. I made one gear—the *Itch* gear—with bright red glass and placed it highest up on the net. The gears just below the *Itch* gear were made in a faded red



Figure 3: *Itch*, 2004

color. The pile on the floor consisted of colorless glass gears. The red gear was the one and only motivator, the *Itch* itself. It symbolized the ability to energize the rest and to potentially set them into motion. This piece was certainly a step in the right direction, yet despite the red and pink color it was still somewhat lifeless. What resulted, though, was the beginning of my artistic relationship with the gallery wall. I placed a layer of lycra/spandex over the wall, painted it with latex paint, and

stretched it to meet the piece. I did this to visually reinforce the potential energy given off by the red *Itch* gear. Where *Itch* connected to the wall it appeared to pull at its skin. I became aware that a dialogue with the wall had begun.

Inside the School of the Arts, I was physically surrounded by walls. I also felt that my own mind was acting as a wall. At the time I had the impression that my years of emphasis on skill-building and tradition were acting as barriers against my current exploration. I recognized my love / hate relationship with the wall. Walls are barriers. Walls also provide refuge. My skin and mind act in much the same way. It is essential to my survival that I have both of these things. They provide me with physical and mental safety, and yet I often wish to rid myself of them! I want to tear them down and free myself of fears and limitations.

I made the pieces *Before* and *After* in 2005. They are the same piece in two different stages. *Before* stretches in towards the center of the room, pulled tightly by a piece of monofilament. *After* embodies the ensuing exhaustion. They deal with the tension self-inflicted by these mental barriers. This piece was the most closely related to the human in all of the work I had done thus far. It spoke of skin and it spoke of time. The lycra, heavily saturated with latex paint, sagged with gravity in a way that suggested belly or breast. The tiny hints of yellow mixed with the gallery's white paint produced a faded effect.



Figure 4: *Before*, 2005



Figure 5: *After*, 2005

I enjoyed working in this manner but I wanted to incorporate even more emotion into my work as well as some mystery. I was excited by the folds created in *After* and decided to pursue working with folds in both glass and textile. There was also a degree of spontaneity in the making of *After* which led to new discoveries. I realized that in order for

my work to evolve, I needed to incorporate a degree of spontaneity into my studio practice. I decided to take a bed sheet and a mattress into the critique room and make a series of “quick studies”, each of which I photographed. When compiled, the photographs form a narrative. I call this grouping *The Visitor*.



Figure 6: *The Visitor* (3 of 26), 2005

Textile had now become a definite resource material for me. One of my favorite pieces, to date, is made of lycra/spandex. It was a site-specific installation made for a grouping of trees at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. This piece appeared to soar through the trees. For me, it sang of freedom. It moved with the wind, it sagged with the rain. As I lay under it I could still make out the tops of the trees through all three layers of material. It reminded me of glass in this way but without any optical distortion.



Figure 7: *Untitled*, 2005 (detail on right)

I continued to work on layering materials. I wanted to add the richness of light passing through color and refer directly to the liquid aspect of both glass and the human body. I wanted to explore the interior world as it related to the exterior one. I had begun this exploration with *Mind Over Matter* but without the warm, liquid aspect. I decided to proceed using colors reminiscent of the body such as pink and red and to fold glass bubbles up while they were still very hot. I assembled a grouping of about fifty crumpled forms into a sphere and covered the entire thing with a sheet of clear vinyl. I slightly melted the vinyl with a heat gun and watched as it crumpled up the way the glass had done. I referred to the vinyl as a skin and to the crumpled glass as knots. I titled the piece *Ache*. It is a stepping stone to *Innate*, my thesis piece, which I will describe in detail later. *Ache* speaks of the physical pain I experience as a result of sciatica and I am convinced that the situation is exaggerated by mental stress. It also speaks of a certain anxious frustration, a life of tension. I carried these ideas into the making of *Innate*.



Figure 8: *Ache*, 2005

For the past nine years, glass has been my major focus and medium of choice. I have always felt at home with it and with the rhythm of the process. But in the past two years at VCU, I began to free up my work a bit more. Rather than working solely with the glass vessel, I work with an array of different materials, many of which fall into the textiles category: nylon, lycra/spandex, cotton sheets, and vinyl. Latex paint and wood have also made their way

into my work. Although I am open to the use of many other materials, I believe that glass will always play a major role in my future self-expression. I have formed a deep bond with this material and many of its qualities, but I am no longer strictly tied to it. I am sure that many of the materials I choose in the future will reflect some of the physical properties of glass such as its transparency and translucency or its ability to appear light-weight.

I write in my sketchbook more than I draw. I can more quickly “store” a feeling through the use of words than through drawing. I often don’t know, at first, what I want a piece to look like. Richard Deacon, in conversation with Pier Luigi Tazzi, says, “I used photographs to document it (my work) but I became much more interested in description as a means of documentation. It had time in it in a more interesting way than a photograph” (8). Through the use of words, a thought or moment can last much longer in my mind and I am more able to capture its poetry. I rely heavily on what I have written in order to re-enter a moment and pull from it. A quick scribble of a drawing serves as a page marker when I need to find a specific section. Otherwise I find that a drawing can restrict an idea by narrowing it down too quickly, closing it off from numerous possibilities.

Now when I work my goal is to evoke an overall mood or emotion. The work has gone from being technique-oriented to fully concept-oriented. I strive to express what it means to be alive, how my attitude and emotions change on a daily basis though the chief outlook on life may be the same. I am constantly attempting to overcome my fears and insecurities and searching for that peace of mind that will allow me to breathe freely. The reality of our existence lies in imperfection, but to live gracefully from day to day we must maintain a balance of all of life’s aspects. In the past I was only able to produce in

moments of clarity when I felt perfectly balanced. Since then, I have learned to embrace the lack of control that I experience in daily life. My work now encompasses both the time I spend searching for this clarity and the few, rare moments of arriving. My work is an attempt to preserve some of life's glorious moments so that I may revisit them when those feelings have gone. But I also want a great portion of my work to embody the struggles and the fatigue. As Cézanne says in Hugh McLeave's fictional biography, *A Man and His Mountain*, "Sense life and you can render its reality. Forget idiotic notions of beautifying it by castrating it and paint the blemishes as well as the beauty" (103).

At times I find myself breaking my own rules with an ease I thought I'd never find. Now, when I blow glass, I relish in what it is that glass wants to do, its inherent qualities as a material, and how it reacts with the environment during the process of its making. I understand glass as well as I do because it, like me, is constantly in a state of flux, at times molten and free but most of the time under stress and tension. My work has become a reaction to my present circumstances, a visual diary. I observe my own emotions and respond to them. I would like this to become as natural, honest, and direct as a physical reflex. My hope is that I can convey a variety of emotions to the viewer, and that the experience will be an enlightening one. The highs are made higher still by the lows that surround them.

Inspirations and Artistic Influences

The human body and the mind are the major inspirations for me. I spent thirteen years of my life as a gymnast, dealing with various aspects of the body and the mind and their strong influences on one another. I concern myself with the external skin and internal soul of the people whom I know and meet. I question who feels comfortable in his own skin and who does not, and why. I ask those same questions of myself. How does one's life develop its complex nature through the layering of events and emotions over time?

The physical and spiritual are connected within our bodies; they inform one another. I *feel* this connection as the events in one's life leave their marks not only in the mind but also on the body. To me they are all like hidden structures making up the foundations of our individual natures. A person's gesture and demeanor define the way in which we experience the visual weight of the external appearance. We must rely on this because we cannot directly see the workings of the mind. In what manner does experience or emotion impose itself on the physical being? What are some of the infinite, possible forms they take on? Are the shoulders hunched due to time, fatigue, dulled spirits, or social insecurity? Do a person's eyes appear empty and sad? Or is there a sparkle in them and a spring in their step? The external can perhaps be read if one takes the time to "listen" visually.

I sat in on a few of Scott Putman's modern dance classes at VCU and felt inspired by what I saw and heard there. Scott is an Assistant Dance Professor at VCU. As he instructs his class he says things like, "You have opposing forces that are working with and against you." He counts in rhythm with the drums, singing short phrases, tossing in the names of parts of the body as each are stretched and poised between balance and tension. Every inch of the body is considered. Every part must connect in order to realize the whole. "You must be energized in order to stretch and in order to balance," Scott announces to the group. He explains how the opposing forces must push down in order to lift up. I witness the dancers "shaping the space" with energy and with resistance. You must "find the energy within you... You are your own universe and you are part of THE universe," he says.

I observe the group all moving as one. They look like synchronized seals as they roll over on the floor. They proceed with their routine for at least a half hour. In that half hour I witness more than one might expect. I observe nature as human, as animal, as constraint, and as freedom.

In my work I think of how materials influence each other when placed in close proximity or when they are combined. How do they enhance each other's strengths, or do they make them obsolete? Sculpture can make tangible that which is invisible to the eye, but which is felt as boldly as a person or an object occupying space. As Richard Deacon states in his book, "What you get from the sculpture is the sheer, mere urgency of something unseen. What your heart does with that is your heart's affair. . ." (95).

There are several artists I look to for guidance and inspiration for various reasons. I am intrigued by work that contains a large percentage of ambiguity. “Ambiguity is a distinct shade of existence,” wrote Simone Racheli (83). I am also drawn to work that is bold and work that is spiritual, and of course these three elements can intertwine. Richard Deacon’s raw and intricate use of materials has great appeal to me. His sculptural pieces are slick while also managing to be somewhat gritty, sensual at times, and introspective. I find the titles of his works to be alluring. A few examples are: *Keeping the Faith*, *Fish out of Water*, *Coat*, *What Could Make me Feel This Way*, and *Not Yet Beautiful*. They provide little clues as to how to approach his work without telling the viewer exactly how to respond. At times there is a great element of surprise as the viewer fluctuates between the title and the piece itself, yet the longer one looks, the greater the reward becomes. I find that Deacon raises questions for the viewer and for society as a whole.

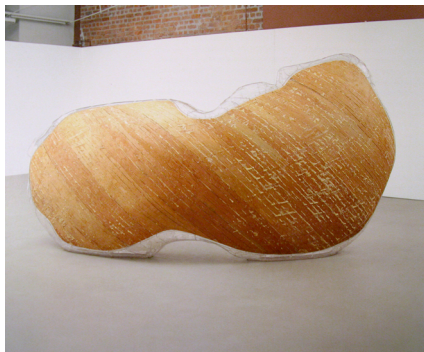


Figure 9: Richard Deacon, *Almost Beautiful*, 1994



Figure 10: Richard Deacon, *You*, 1998

I am not only aesthetically drawn to Deacon’s work but I relate to what he says about it and what it embodies:

“ . . . explore where a shape ends, how it is ‘contained’ by its profile at the same time as slipping from it, and how we experience inside and outside” (175).

Matter is much closer to language and I wanted to make sculpture that showed that aspect of belonging to the human more than belonging to the world. . . . There is a certain indefiniteness or ambiguity to a lot of the things that I do in relationship to what they might look like, and at the same time the great specificity of material and of the substance of the work is clear. The form is clear but there’s also a desire for a potential plasticity or fluidity which remains latent. In a sense I have been trying to attach sculpture to a perception or to experience rather than attaching it the world (15).

Another thing about Deacon’s work that helped me to counteract my thoughts that my years of skill-building were getting in my way, is the tremendous amount of crafted labor and skill that goes into the making of them. As Peter Schjeldahl points out in Deacon’s book:

. . . we view excessive craftsmanship in art as a vulgarity fully as distracting as shoddiness. An artwork should be made exactly and only as well as it must be for its idea to be realized. Deacon has violated this principle relentlessly. Indeed, a powerful impression of over-the-top craftsmanship is a keynote of his poetic—of the Deaconian (92–93).

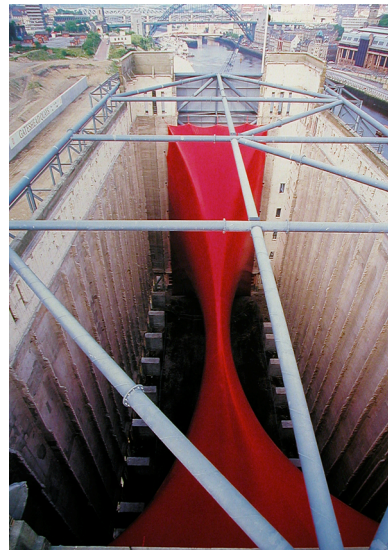
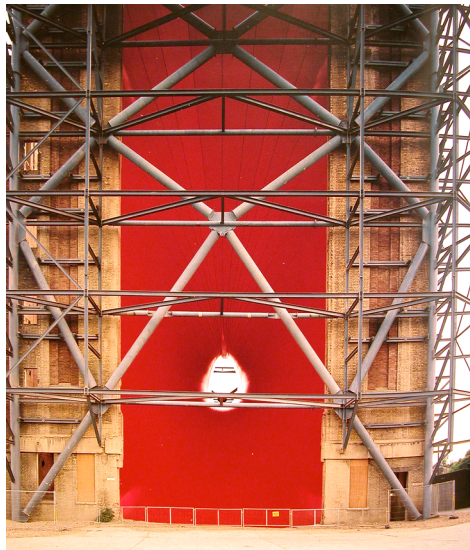


Figure 11: Anish Kapoor, *Tarantantara*, 1999

Another artist whose work I greatly admire and who also focuses on the inside and outside is Anish Kapoor. His use of color and form is explosive. There is a great physical tension in the forms themselves and within spaces surrounding his pieces. Each piece contains its own interior and exterior, each one getting confused in the other.

I am greatly moved by the work of the Minimalists Richard Serra, Donald Judd, and Agnes Martin, although Judd strongly rejected the title of Minimalist, preferring to “describe his work as, ‘the simple expression of complex thought’” (qtd. in *Donald Judd* 7). In the work of all three of these artists there is a defined use of form, line, and impression made upon a space, whether that space is created illusionistically or in three dimensions. In reference to Judd’s work Rudi Fuchs informs us that:

Nothing was more fundamental to Judd’s practical understanding of art than the notion that works of art, and in particular sculpture, create space and define the dynamic nature of space. . . how art and architecture, when they are good, make space visible and how space is a precious quality (15).

This notion of a profound space really sings to me. I am very interested in the relationship between space that is external to the body and “space” within a body. By this I refer to a spiritual space. I have found that when an external space out in the world has been strongly considered, it is easier for us to access our internal one. I find a great deal of spirituality in Agnes Martin’s work. As Martin mentions in her book, “Art restimulates inspirations and awakens sensibilities, that’s the function of art” (20). She goes on to say that, “inspiration. . . is an untroubled mind. Of course we know that an untroubled state of mind cannot last

so we say that inspiration comes and goes but really it is there all the time waiting for us to be untroubled again” (24).

I find the work of Korean artist Do-Ho Suh to be both bold and spiritual. Do-Ho Suh’s *Staircase*, 2003 is an example. A staircase made of red, translucent nylon rises two stories from floor to ceiling in the middle of a vast space. Or does it descend? *Paratrooper-V*, 2005 is a good example of boldness and tension. Red linen and polyester threads in the form of a parachute are stretched taught across a gallery to wrap around the arms of a cast, stainless steel paratrooper frozen in a pulling motion.

Ann Hamilton confuses the boundaries between architecture and the human body in her installation spaces. One example is her piece, *Welle*, shown at the Carnegie International Exhibition of 1999. As Madeleine Grynsztejn describes it, “Hamilton has consistently transformed the enclosing architecture of her chosen sites into vast, animated, epidermal sheaths that reawaken the viewer to otherwise conventional surroundings” (103). From a distance *Welle* appears to be a straightforward, white wall. Upon closer inspection, the viewer notices that there is a glimmer to it and that something is subtly moving. This beckons the viewer to come even nearer until he recognizes that tiny drops of water are emerging from “pores” in the wall’s skin. The wall is crying, or sweating, depending upon the viewer’s perspective.

I also have an inclination towards multiples. The dark beauty of Jack Wax’s work has always intrigued me, along with a similar quality that I find in the work of Michael Scheiner. Wax’s use of repeated, blown glass forms are intentionally imperfect and even dirty at times. They form a balance between that which is rough and that which is fragile,

that which repeats itself but that never truly repeats itself. Another glass artist using multiples who has inspired me over the past few years is Harumi Yuketake. Her simple, hand-made multiples create complex and elegant systems. Her work is much more uplifting, lighter in feel and in spirit, than that of Jack Wax or Michael Scheiner. Other artists to mention are Linda Benglis and her knot work from the 1970s which I find to be rich and troubling, Pat Hickman's netted and cast Entrance Gates at the Maui Arts and Cultural Centre in Hawaii, and Wolfgang Tillman's work, whose *Blushes* photographs make me think of water and blood cells. There is so much movement! He also captures the beauty in daily, mundane objects and surroundings.

Other inspirations have come from literature such as *A Man and His Mountain: The Life of Paul Cézanne* by Hugh McLeave, *Body & Soul* by Frank Conroy, the poems of Philip Levine, and although it may seem surprising, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which has been this year's great inspiration for me. Dark truths of life are revealed in this fantasy. There is so much love and understanding, hatred and war between the different peoples of these tales, and life is a balance of these forces.

What I search for on a daily basis are a few moments when I am hyper-aware of who I am and where I am. I wish for everything to be crisp and clear. I want to feel alive. The moment does not have to be anything particularly special, just that I am truly awake enough, in both body and soul, to experience it. I will share with you a few excerpts I have chosen from some of this literature: From *Body & Soul*:

. . . the power of the music in the abstract was especially strong, as if emanating from the very walls of the building. They were playing the music, minds, bodies, and souls stretched near to the limit, but it was also true that the music was playing them. A balancing act of excruciating fragility, but to Claude sweet beyond words, sweet beyond imagining (312).

For the first time in a long time he awoke without trepidation. The clear blue sky, the steady sunlight spilling through the window, seemed to mirror his own calmness. The world was simply there. He felt a quiet wonder at its eternal otherness, at its uncaring peacefulness. He showered, shaved, and got dressed. He went down to the kitchen and made himself a full breakfast – and ate with pleasure. There was a certain clarity to things. The taste of the blackberry jam, the sound of the water running in the sink as he cleaned up, the stiff texture of a fresh dishcloth. Sensation itself took up his attention, providing a rest from thought, from emotion (373–4).

From *A Man and His Mountain*:

“‘Art isn’t mathematics, Emeeloo. It’s here and there.’ He stabbed a finger at his brow and navel” (14).

. . . Marion could guess why he (Cézanne) felt so frustrated. Nobody could paint a picture on his own terms if he were trying, like this man, to inject the whole of his personality into it without betraying the shape of a face, a still life, or a landscape. No one could paint the air, as Cézanne was trying to do (261).

From Philip Levine’s, *Not This Pig*: (Silent in America, “Vivas for those who have failed. . .” (44))

Sometimes on especially
warm evenings I
take a card chair out under
the almond tree

and catching the last light, speak
to myself without
words. I try to catch what is
behind my throat,

without words, all that exists
behind and before.
Under the low branches the
earth’s matted floor,

cropped Bermuda and clover

that the bees attack,
glistens in shade. The sprinkler
swings out of dark

into light and back again,
and the water sighs
as though it were suffering
before my eyes.

Before my own eyes I am
almost speaking; my
jaws ache for release, for
words that will say

anything. I force myself
to remember
who I am, what I am, and
why I am here.

INNATE

Through my frustration and irritation, bordering, at times, on bitterness and anger, I have stumbled across the beauty of imperfection. I have come to realize that there is nothing perfect about perfection except that it exists for only a moment and then it is gone. “Perfect” is a mere moment among many others. There is tension in it, but my feeling is that tension cannot touch it long enough to leave its mark. Tension acts only as a balancing point. It serves to charge and enrich the moment. A spring blossom, a flirtatious exchange of glances, a sunrise or sunset, a “good morning” from a stranger on the street are examples of such moments. So that moment IS, and IS without restraints, and then it vanishes.

We all have innate qualities; they are unceasing condition of our nature, existing quietly or violently, proudly tucked deep within the layers of our being. Whatever it is, it has always been there, inherent in our character, and ultimately, there it will remain, uninhibited. Our souls and psyches are reflected onto our bodies. Our bodies are the walking windows into our souls. Our inner fire burns. It wanes. It burns and wanes. An incredibly intense dialogue occurs between the mind, the spirit and the body. My emotions are directly reflected in my posture and in the manner of my movements. I discover my

state of being by analyzing these movements and I derive a great deal of comfort from engaging myself in physical activities. My innate qualities reside in physical, rhythmic movements, knowledge gained through the discipline of repetition, and a driving desire to communicate my emotions.

The making of *Innate* has two sources of inspiration. One was to leave any sign of the traditional glass vessel out of my sculptural work. I wanted to separate myself from it to such an extent as to allow myself to literally destroy it. I felt the urgent need to free myself from my own history with glass, from the confines of my mind, and from all that I had learned so far because I felt bound to it. I wanted to let go of my need for control. I made a perfect sphere and crumpled it up, while hot, like a piece of paper about to be thrown into the trash. I broke the very rules that I had created for myself over the years. The feelings I've achieved are those of release and spontaneity. It is just what I've been searching for but afraid to execute up until this point. In 1974 a French street performer named Philippe Petit illegally rigged a cable between the twin towers of New York City. He later wrote about his experience:

The day of today witnesses a sacred expedition. A cyclic path. The repetitive bliss of exploration, the same, never the same. . . Victorious, I linger at the very middle of the crossing, exactly where the void, now defeated, used to vent its might. . . You keep shifting their hearts from fear to happiness. . . and I breathe like never before. Such outlaw felicity, I confess, brings me to sleep. . . The city has changed face. Its maddening daily rush has transformed into a magnificent motionlessness. It listens. It watches. It ponders (194–195, 196, 198).

The second source of my inspiration is the pain of sciatica within my body, a condition that I have dealt with my whole life. I refer to it as my Demon. My Demon

manipulates me without ever destroying me, only exhausting and frustrating me. My muscles tighten and knot in my hips, sending aching waves down to my ankles. If I do not act within the half hour the deep ache will override me and I will be unable to walk with ease. My quadriceps feel as hard as rocks and the skin tight like leather. The sensation is that of being weighed down, overpowered, weak, and unable to defend myself. I feel tied to the Demon that seems to reside deep down in the very marrow of my bones.

My work is personal and my hope is that it is also universal in speaking of the quality of being human. I want it to speak of our limitations and our strengths as individuals, of our feelings and emotions, curiosities and desires. *Innate* is an exploration of the self, not so as to arrive at a complete understanding but to acknowledge and accept what it is that I cannot control, and what I will never fully comprehend, my humanness. In *Body & Soul*, Claude's music teacher and mentor says to him:

So it's weird. who cares? Listen as hard as you can to the new sounds, even if you don't think you're controlling them, which seems to bother you so much. Concentrate. You might begin to hear more. . . widely. Maybe, as good as your ear is, who's to say, maybe, under pressure, you'll hear more deeply a little bit? (174).

In these moments of acceptance I embrace the lows and move forward. I am thankful for and also relieved by the changes that occur. With each new life experience I feel wiser, stronger, and less vulnerable than I previously did. Facing life becomes a bit less daunting. *Innate* has come into being because of my need to express the anxiety, confusion, and frustration that I have built up over the years and never been able to realize in my work. Cézanne writes in a letter to Fanny, “. . . Is not suffering relieved when it is allowed to express itself?” (252) *Innate* is a visual expression of the continuous struggle

between balance and loss of balance, between moving forward and falling. It embodies the state of flux between the growing and diminishing sense of momentum, the internal fights between body and mind, the insecurities and doubts, the reaching and searching, the weightiest of moments. No object or living thing ever remains constant. Nature does not allow for this. As Agnes Martin states in her book, “You never rest with nature. It’s a hungry thing” (17). Everything is slowly growing or decaying, waxing and waning, even if the appearance is that of stability. “Even things that have all the earmarks of substance—things that are hard, inert, solid—present nothing more than the *illusion* of permanence” (Koren, 46, 49). We are a mass of moving liquids, tissue and bone. Our state of being is ever changing, ever evolving, and remains constant only in its cyclical nature. There is no escape from this state of moving. I go to war with myself. The fight is to love the fight itself. Suddenly I am free—the perfect moment—and then the moment is gone again. From *A Man and His Mountain*:

He had discovered new beauty in a motif that had always been there, before his eyes – something as solid and grandiose as he felt weak and puny, something that seemed to defy every artist who had tried to paint it. Montagne Sainte-Victoire. . .

But Sainte-Victoire! Surely he, who knew this mountain intimately, could transform it into great art. . . . If he did nothing else, he would capture some part of the timeless element of this peak and paint it to his own satisfaction.

. . . But Sainte-Victoire rebelled. Like some living thing, it shrank or expanded according to the light; on silver-blue morning or in stark noon light, it retreated, while in violet twilight, it advanced; in mist or rain, it crouched, profiled like some dinosaur, over the town. But of course! Warm colors at the red end of the spectrum made things seem nearer and the blues did the reverse. . . Color! Everything stemmed from that. Volume. Perspective. Even proportion. And every nuance of color had its own message for the senses and the mind (267, 274–275).

I would like *Innate* to provide the viewer with a translucent moment. It is a window of sorts, yet maintains disguises. The mystery must remain. That is what embodies this life we live in. I will keep the viewer guessing as I myself am always guessing.

There are over two hundred crumpled, glass spheres making up this piece. Each reflects many human qualities. The folds in each one create layers which create depth. Depth is what summarizes humanity. They form dense areas like the knots in fabric and in muscle tissue, like the stubbornness of the mind, like the folds in skin. Human skin conforms to the way the bones and muscle move. It stretches and twists. Its complexity increases as the folds multiply. The liquid/membrane aspect of each glass part reflects my vulnerability as a living being. The crumpled aspect, folds and layers, reflect my emotional vulnerability as a human being. To me they simultaneously invoke a sense of lightness and urgency. Most appear to be weightless and liquid. The majority of the colors are warm and inviting. Yet they are withered and defeated. They are also forceful and elegant, caught somewhere between self-destruction and re-birth. They are in flux. In this way they form a balance between vulnerability and strength. They reflect my desire to crush and my desire to free and release, my desire to break out of my own mold, to escape my own skin, and also my desire to accept and move forward. They are my anxious claustrophobia and my free spirit. As Richard Deacon says:

It seems to me an intriguing thing and an extraordinary possibility that under the umbrella of making autonomous objects there are aspects of one's experience in the world that are sometimes separated and sometimes coherent, and it is possible to make objects that characterize those two modalities (29).



Figure 12: *Innate*, 2006 (detail on right)

The gallery space itself is about this mysterious form that began as a sphere. I am drawn to the sphere because I find it to be self-contained, controlled, and balanced. It is an example of the power and strength of simplicity. To me it represents life and its cycles. There are no edges or corners, no beginning or end, but rather a continuation of time. It does not sit as a cube does in space. In relation to the human body, a cube is flat-footed. It is a man nestled into a couch. A sphere is more like a man standing, ready to walk or run. It is much more active and has the potential to move at any time. A sphere cannot easily be tucked into a corner. The sphere offers an ideal relationship. It does not embody the every day experience. It does not speak of the lows, the fights with oneself, the doubts and endless questioning. This is where *Innate* breaks away from the sphere. It is both separated and whole, made up of many smaller parts united to form one piece. I chose to place it in a very small space, to enlarge it in scale, and to make it push out from the sphere in a reaching manner. Tension forms between its skin and that of the wall. The space is charged

and so is the form, now asymmetrical and directional. Its scale begins to speak of things other than the body: the mind, the spirit, the soul. It is trapped in a box that is far too small for it. It is a soul trapped in its skin, pushing all calmness out of itself. The apparent activity happening inside it reflects this struggle. The splotches of color, the dense reds mixed with soft pinks and hints of blue reflect this. Its skin is not smooth, even, and finished, but rather bumpy and bulging. Its vinyl exterior plays its part as another skin, folding, revealing and concealing. The form desires to outgrow its environment, as I often desire to escape from my own nature, my rules, and my Demon. *Innate* takes its form from my desire to live in peace with myself and from the struggle with the parasite that gains power as it feeds on and weakens its host. It reflects this overwhelming physical ache that takes over at times, and the emotional ache that precedes or ensues. It is the inner critic that rarely tires. All of them make me feel so small, so vulnerable, so *only* human. I think to myself, “We are but flesh and muscle, living meat and water, breathing, moving, growing. We are fragile and weak yet with the potential to be strong.”

The light brings the glass to life, activating its inherent qualities as a material. Glass has a great ability to hold and reflect light. The light emanating from within *Innate* is reminiscent of the glow of glass in liquid-hot form. The light represents the Life, the energy, and the drive to overcome. It is the *Mind Over Matter*, the *Itch*, and the *Ache*.

Literature Cited

Literature Cited

- Allthorpe-Guyton, Marjorie, et al, eds. *Anish Kapoor: Taratantara*. Barcelona: Actar Publishers, 2000.
- Conroy, Frank. *Body & Soul*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1993.
- Fuchs, Rudi, et al., eds. *Donald Judd*. London: Tate Publishing, 2004.
- Grynsztejn, Madeleine. *CI:99/00/V.01: Carnegie International 1999/2000*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 1999.
- Koren, Leonard. *Wabi-Sabi: for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1994.
- Levine, Philip. "Silent In America." *Not This Pig*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968.
- Martin, Agnes, and Ann Wilson. *Agnes Martin*. Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1973.
- McLeave, Hugh. *A Man and His Mountain*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977.
- Petit, Philippe. *To Reach the Clouds: My High Wire Walk Between the Twin Towers*. New York: North Point Press, 2002.
- Racheli, Simone. "Racheli." *Tema Celeste* January/February. 2006: 113.
- Thompson, Jon, et al., eds. *Richard Deacon*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000.

VITA

Kiara Pelissier

born: Guadalajara, Mexico, 1976

United States Citizen

EDUCATION:

2006 **M.F.A.** Master of Fine Arts / Glass
Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts – Richmond, VA

2000 **B.F.A.** Bachelor of Fine Arts / Glass
Cleveland Institute of Art – Cleveland, OH

2005 / 2003 / 1999 **Haystack Mountain School of Crafts** – Deer Isle, ME
- Rico Eastman and Cynthia Thompson (Architectural Fabric)
- Karen Stahlecker (Japanese Papermaking)
- Jose Chardiet (Glass)

2002 / 1999 **Corning Studio of Glass** – Corning, NY
- Elio Quariza
- William Gudenrath

1995–2001 **Penland School of Crafts** – Penland, NC
- Michael Schunke
- Marc Petrovic
- Jack Wax
- Joe Nielander
- Kari Russell-Pool

1997 **Pilchuck Glass School** – Stanwood, WA
- Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisburg

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT:

2004 **Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts**
- Glass 251 (Intro) Instructor

2003 **The 16th Niijima International Glass Art Festival** – Niijima, Japan
- Teaching Assistant for Brent Kee Young

2001–2003 **Michael Schunke, Glassblower** – West Grove, PA

- Full-time Assistant
- Part-time Assistant

- 2002 **Haystack Mountain School of Crafts**
 - Teaching Assistant for Jack Wax

- 1998–2001 **Marc Petrovic, Glass Sculptor** – Essex, CT
 - Part-time Assistant

- 2001 **Haystack Mountain School of Crafts**
 - Teaching Assistant for Jose Chardiet, New England Workshop

- 2000 / 2001 **Pilchuck Glass School**
 - Teaching Assistant for John Miller
 - Teaching Assistant for Randy Walker

- 2000–2001 **Corning Studio of Glass**
 - Teaching Assistant for William Gudenrath

- 1999 **Cleveland Institute of Art**
 - President, Student Artist Association – organization of annual student sale

- 1998–1999 **Riley-Hawk Glass Gallery** – Cleveland, OH
 - Gallery Assistant

- 1998 **Cleveland Institute of Art**
 - Teaching Assistant for Marc Petrovic

GRANTS / SCHOLARSHIPS / RESIDENCIES:

- 2003 **Cleveland Institute of Art (CIA)** - Cleveland, OH
 - Glass Residency

- 2003 **Contemporary Glass Philadelphia Grant**
 - \$500 to attend Haystack

- 2003 **Winterpark Sidewalk Art Festival** - Winterpark, FL
 - Recipient of Emerging Artists Program Grant

- 1999–2000 **Honorary Scholarship** – CIA

- 1999 **The Eleanor A. and Jack D. Zipp Scholarship for Excellence in Glass** – CIA

EXHIBITIONS / SHOWS:

- 2006 **Capital One, West Creek Campus** – Richmond, VA
 - “Select Works | Exhibition of VCU MFA Candidates”

- 2006 **Claremont Graduate University Gallery** – Claremont, CA

- 'W/E Trade' Exhibition
- 2005 **Quirk Gallery** – Richmond, VA
- 'Watt's Up?' Inaugural Exhibition
- 2004 **Flat International Gallery** – Richmond, VA
- Solo MFA Candidacy Show
- 2004 **F.A.B. Gallery, VCU School of the Arts** – Richmond, VA
- 'Introspection', Juried Craft Exhibition
- 2003 **Sandusky Cultural Center** – Sandusky, OH
- 'New Glass' Exhibition
- 2003 **Winterpark Sidewalk Art Festival** – Winterpark, FL
- Emerging Artists Program
- 2001 / 2000 **B.K. Smith Gallery, Lake Erie College** – Painesville, OH
- '48 Hours of Making Art'
- 'Recent Regional BFA Exhibition'
- 2000 **Reinberger Galleries, Cleveland Institute Of Art** – Cleveland, OH
Student Summer Show

PRIVATE & PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

- Quirk Gallery** – Richmond, VA
- Diane Dalto & Richard Woosnam**, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Capital One West Creek Campus**, Richmond, Virginia